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SUBJECT: Uzbekistan: ICRC Prison Monitoring Program Extended

¶1. (SBU) Raffaello Muller, Deputy Head of the International Committee for the Red Cross's (ICRC) Regional Delegation, informed poloff today that the GOU agreed on Wednesday, August 5, 2009, to extend last year's six-month pilot program allowing ICRC to enter and evaluate prisons. Prison visits are authorized to begin immediately, and to go on indefinitely.

¶2. (SBU) The prison visits will be allowed only in the same types of institutions as in last year's program: actual prison facilities run by the Ministry of the Interior. Muller stated that negotiations are continuing, however, and that he believes he will have even more positive news soon - perhaps as early as next week, on related activities. ICRC had been pushing for access to additional facilities, such as pre-trial detention holding areas and police stations, so it may be that its program will be expanded to include those facilities.

¶3. (SBU) Muller stated that the GOU wants to keep this issue low-profile. Therefore, although ICRC will answer inquiries openly, it will not be doing an official announcement or press release of any kind.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: This agreement is indeed being kept very quiet, in fact, it was only because of an off-hand comment at the MFA yesterday that post followed up with the ICRC and learned about the agreement today. This issue was one of the top priorities on our human rights agenda, however, and it was something that Under Secretary Bill Burns brought up during his meetings here in July. We'll never know for sure what impact these efforts had, but we're certainly pleased to report this development. End comment.  
BUTCHER